

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

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April 30, 2009

The President  
White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President,

As you are aware, with the new emergence of a virus, federal officials and health professionals must carefully provide accurate information to the public without inciting fear. Given the recent emergence of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus in the United States, I am concerned that Vice President Biden's appearance on NBC's Today Show this morning provided advice to the American public that contradicts the expert medical guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The first pillar of the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, which was published by the Homeland Security Council in November 2005, is preparedness and communications. The Strategy states that the federal government should:

"Work to ensure clear, effective and coordinated risk communication, domestically and internationally, before and during a pandemic. This includes identifying credible spokespersons at all levels of government to effectively coordinate and communicate helpful, informative messages in a timely manner."

It is critical for preparedness and response to minimize the harmful effect of misinformation or the diversion of resources away from scientifically supported prevention methods. Furthermore, misinformation can have a damaging impact on the economy and specific industries.

When asked on the Today Show about the type of advice Vice President Biden was providing his family regarding swine influenza A (H1N1) virus, he offered the following advice, "I would tell members of my family, and I have, I wouldn't go anywhere in confined places now. It's not that its going to Mexico, its that you are in a confined aircraft when one person sneezes, it goes all the way through the aircraft. That's

me. I would not be at this point, if they had another way of transportation, suggesting they ride the subway."

This broad travel advice from a very senior Administration official directly contradicts the CDC. The CDC website states, "CDC has NOT recommended that people avoid travel at this time." Such a contradiction could do unnecessary and irreparable harm to the airline and travel industries.

Adding further confusion to the situation, Vice President Biden's office has also released a statement that clearly recounts an inaccurate synopsis of the Vice President's statements made on the Today Show. More Americans watch the Today Show than are regularly checking the White House website for press statements. I am very concerned that Senior Administration officials are not adhering to scientific-based advice when updating the public on steps that should be taken in order to protect oneself from swine influenza A (H1N1) virus.

It is possible for misinformation to do great harm. I encourage you to review the Administration's current communication strategy so that it conforms to the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza's mandate that statements from the Administration be clear, helpful, and informative. Additionally, I ask you to provide clarification by fully explaining any concerns your Administration has for Americans who utilize mass transit or are planning to fly commercial airlines domestically.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa  
Ranking Member